



December 8, 2018

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Docket 18-336
Implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018

Dear Commissioners:

I write on behalf of Oregon Council for Behavioral Health (OCBH) to urge you to designate a 3-digit code as a Behavioral Health and Suicide Crisis Lifeline. The time is now to embrace mental and emotional wellness as a national priority – and to deliver 3-digit access to crisis intervention services. Three-digit access will:

- Deliver timely and effective crisis intervention services to millions of Americans
- Make it easier to connect people in need with help
- Meet the *dramatically* growing need for crisis intervention
- Help eliminate the stigma of mental health by normalizing help seeking for mental illness with the same priority we deliver for services like fire and rescue, social service referral, and telecommunication referral for people with hearing disabilities

OCBH is comprised of over 40 private and non-profit providers of Behavioral Health Services in the state of Oregon. Our members provide the full spectrum of best practice informed Substance use Disorder, Mental Health care, supported housing and social services from prevention early intervention through residential setting for our most vulnerable citizens. Our organization members are mission driven from their leadership, administration, care providers, through numerous volunteers. We exist to support the improved health of individuals, families and our local communities. Our statewide membership represents a combined annual budget of \$500,000,000.00, employ over 8,000 citizens, are supported by hundreds of volunteers and donors, and most significantly serve tens of thousands of Oregonians annually on their journey to recovery, independence and health. Our services connect us to our partners in government, commercial markets and local business. Our Boards and leadership are a cross sector from our communities including, local business leaders, attorneys, educators, veterans, researchers, fellow concerned citizens and persons with lived experience to name but a few.

We submit this letter in support for the implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018 call to you to not wait and act today to create a line that is nationally consistent and easy to recall for our many citizens who need support in their most vulnerable moments, so they have a chance for healing. Our members dedicated staff including peers, counselors, clinical therapists, psychiatrists save lives – quite literally – every day.



The Centers for Disease Control reported that over 40,000 Americans died by suicide last year -- driving the national suicide rate to its highest rate in decades. Sadly, this loss of life every day not only is an individual tragedy but, increases the chance that every citizen in our country is closer to sharing a common story of a lost child, adult loved one, friend or coworker. As Behavioral Health professionals we have long known that substance use and suicide are often hand in hand. Recently the CDC also reported that drug overdose deaths had climbed to an all-time high -- killing over 70,000 people last year -- deaths that often represent a failure of effective mental health intervention, as people facing untreated mental illness resort to self "medication" through illicit drugs. The time to act is now.

As a society we know consistency and ease of access are critical to success for any intervention, Suicide Prevention is no different. Every child in our country from an early age knows 911 is for emergency, imagine the impact for youth and families in need if they knew help was only 3 numbers away. 3-digit lines are effective simple and successful. 3-digit access to crisis services represent a national recognition that seeking help for behavioral health and suicidal crisis is just as much a part of life as seeking help for fire, for injury, or for other health and wellness needs.

***A 3-digit dedicated National Suicide line** will not only save lives but serve as direct statement that each individual matter's and that suicide and its prevention are a national matter without shame.*

As a behavioral health professional, I have served too many parents who have lost a child and too many children and youth who have lost a friend or parent to untreated crisis. Stigma creates a culture where getting help for mental health crisis is shunned, uncool and something we don't talk about. Establishing national 3-digit access to crisis services will help tear down the stigma that claims the lives of people struggling with mental health every day and connect millions of Americans to help that works.

Finally, it is imperative for 3-digit lines success to be clear simple and **stand alone**. Individuals in crisis need clear concrete supports, that are simple, swift and provide immediate highly trained best practice interventions to be most effective.

Our nation's crisis in suicide and behavioral health warrants a service devoted **exclusively** to meeting these needs.

Thank you very much for your interest and thoughtful approach to this important issue. We stand at the threshold of a revolution in improved mental health and wellness services for people throughout the United States. The FCC is poised to take an important step in that revolution by designating a 3-digit Behavioral Health and Suicide Crisis Lifeline. We urge the FCC to make this designation.

Respectfully,

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Oregon Council for Behavioral Health